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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PRAGUE 000343

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [YI](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: VISIT OF UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ERIC EDELMAN
TO PRAGUE

REF: PRAGUE 206

Classified By: DCM Cameron Munter
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman visited Prague on March 27-28 and met separately with Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr (Sasa) Vondra, Deputy Defense Minister Martin Bartak, and a group of key Czech parliamentarians. While there was some substantive discussion on Afghanistan and Kosovo, each meeting focused primarily on the U.S. proposal to establish a missile defense radar in the Czech Republic. Vondra and Bartak both displayed serious commitment to making the missile defense project a success. They also requested additional U.S. support to positively influence Czech public opinion, and U.S. assistance in influencing European allies. The opposition Parliamentarians want the government to discuss the issue on the floor of Parliament, and emphasized concerns that the U.S. missile defense system not divide Europe. End summary.

MOD perspective on Missile Defense

12. (C) Meeting with Deputy Defense Minister Martin Bartak, USD/P Edelman observed that misperceptions continue to color the debate on missile defense for Europe. He highlighted the threat from Iran, DPRK-Iran cooperation, and the difficult task of predicting when states would develop new capabilities. Building a missile defense in Europe after nations such as Iran developed the capability to strike would be a more difficult and delicate proposition. Russia's public arguments against missile defense were clearly false, and betrayed political motives. It would be a mistake to allow Russia a veto over the conduct of former Warsaw Pact members. Russia's reaction to new missile threats from the south was to seek new offensive capabilities at the expense of the INF Treaty. At the same time Moscow sought to restrain the West from deploying a missile defense to respond to the same threat. USD/P Edelman also noted that use of the Russian missile defense system's nuclear tipped warheads should be far more prominent in the minds of the environmentalists than the lumps of metal used in the U.S. hit-to-kill technology. In regard to NATO, USD/P Edelman said the logical approach would be for the U.S. to deploy a long-range missile defense that would work in parallel with, and be compatible with, NATO projects to deal with shorter range threats.

13. (C) Bartak said he agreed on all points, before sharing that residents of the area near the proposed facility were

focused on local aspects. He shared that the population fears environmental and health problems will accompany deployment of a radar. Bartak requested expedited U.S. provision of Missile Defense Agency technical experts for consultation with their Czech counterparts, as well as non MDA-doctors and environmental personnel to brief Czech military doctors. Bartak also requested that the U.S. discuss missile defense with Austria, as the Czech Government fears Vienna could decide to try to handle the issue within the framework of the European Union. He also requested assistance with the leaders of France and Germany, and was glad to learn that USD/P Edelman had already briefed in Paris and would consult in Berlin on March 28. Bartak also said U.S.-Czech coordination on Russia would be helpful, as President Vaclav Klaus plans to visit Moscow at the end of April.

Afghanistan

14. (C) USD/P Edelman outlined U.S. commitment to the future of Afghanistan. He highlighted plans for USD 11.8 billion in financial support (including USD 7.4 billion to accelerate the training of Afghan security forces). USD/P Edelman recounted his personal experience of seeing the results of U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and cautioned that allied use of the term "Taliban Spring offensive" inappropriately conveyed a sense of military legitimacy to terrorist attacks on the visible signs of development. Edelman thanked the Czech Government for the 2006 deployment of Czech special forces to Afghanistan. He noted the troops had served with distinction, and a future redeployment would be very welcome.

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15. (C) Bartak said the Czech strategy on Afghanistan was to find contributions that would have an effective impact without placing troops where they would be "unable to survive" given the current level of Czech military capabilities. He said the budget cuts facing the Czech Ministry of Defense were deep, but the Ministry would prioritize funding to preserve the level of Czech foreign deployments. Bartak said that Czech Ambassador to NATO Stefan Fule was in contact with DSACEUR to discuss possible Czech PRT locations in Afghanistan. The Czech special forces would be ready to deploy again in early 2008. Bartak said he could offer a Czech special forces deployment to Nimruz to act in a reconnaissance role. However, a Czech deployment of a PRT to Nimruz would not be feasible because of that location's logistical challenges and isolation from allied military support. Bartak also added that a contingent of Czech military police trained in special operations would soon deploy to Helmand province with the UK.

16. (C) Bartak noted that Hungary had decided to remain at Pol-e-Khomri, the location selected by the Czech Government for the first ever Czech-led PRT. He indicated that Daikondi would be beyond the capabilities of Czech Forces but Lowgar, Ghazni, and Uruzgan could be possibilities. The level of available NATO financial and other support for a Czech deployment would be crucial in determining the location. Also, he said the farther the location is from Kabul, the less likely the Czech Republic would feel able to play the role of lead nation in a PRT.

Kosovo

17. (C) While time constraints prevented a full discussion of recent developments in relation to Kosovo, USD/P Edelman reiterated SECDEF Gates' assurances on U.S. commitment to our shared interests in KFOR. USD/P Edelman urged European solidarity and support for the Ahtisaari plan in face of Russian threats to wield a veto in the UNSC. That was the

best way to help Russia find its way to a constructive position.

Deputy Prime Minister's perspective on Missile Defense

¶8. (C) USD/P Edelman's meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Sasa Vondra focused exclusively on missile defense. Vondra spent much of the meeting sharing his perspective on the challenges facing the Czech Republic and the United States on the path to successful approval of missile defense for Europe.

¶9. (C) Vondra suggested that missile defense negotiations should proceed at a relatively slow pace, to allow sufficient time to influence both public and parliamentary opinion in the Czech Republic. USD/P Edelman agreed there should be no arbitrary deadline for conclusion of negotiations. However, he maintained that the overriding consideration would be the need to have a defense in place before Europe finds itself within range of emerging ballistic missile threats. Progress should be made as quickly as possible, hopefully concluding by the fall, but obviously shaped by the need to ensure successful passage of an authorization bill in the Czech Parliament.

¶10. (C) Vondra noted that mention of NATO would be crucial to Czech citizens during the missile defense debate. The degree of coordination with NATO could be the key factor in delivering Green Party parliamentary votes in favor of missile defense. The Czech Republic would not/not want to ask NATO for authorization, but Vondra suggested a public statement that the United States is "open to the system becoming part of NATO." USD/P Edelman countered that a better U.S. statement would say the "architecture makes the system compatible with NATO."

¶11. (C) Vondra said U.S. outreach could have a significant impact on the outcome in the Czech Republic. As an example he praised the Ambassador's decision to address the Social Democratic Party's annual congress on March 23rd. This speech had demonstrated U.S. commitment to openness and cooperation,

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and had effectively quashed any hopes that missile defense opponents had of passing a resolution against missile defense. Vondra also shared that the voices of Congressional Democrats could be instrumental in blunting claims that missile defense is a partisan Republican program that will be eliminated the next time a Democrat sits in the White House. USDP noted that ballistic missile defense has significant bipartisan support, particularly after last year's DPRK Tae Po Dong 2 missile test.

¶12. (C) Vondra observed that the instinct of the United States, when faced with a problem, is to act to solve that problem. By contrast, he said the instinct of Europe when faced with a security challenge is to sweep the problem under the carpet and hope it will go away. Vondra believed that this predisposition could not be changed in the short term, and would require years, perhaps decades, of effort. In the interim he said it would be best to present MD as a choice for Europe. A Europe without a long-range missile defense would be isolated, while a European "yes" to missile defense would ensure the future of transatlantic togetherness in the face of future threats.

¶13. (C) Vondra theorized that Germany is advancing the cause of the European Constitution as a mechanism to increase German influence in Europe, and that MD offers to the Czech Republic and Poland had left the Germans feeling envious. USD/P Edelman suggested that Germany's handling of MD stemmed from both a lack of information and from domestic political concerns. While the U.S. could not play a role in domestic German politics, sharing the facts more

widely could bring dividends.

14 (C) Vondra asked about Polish requests to be compensated for hosting U.S. missile defense assets. USD/P Edelman responded that nonsensical requests for military hardware would lead nowhere. If Poland could present a persuasive military rationale for assistance with a security threat then the United States would be open to discussing the problem.

¶15. (C) Vondra finally observed that other issues could impact the future of the missile defense initiative. Removal of Poland from plans to extend visa-free travel to Allies would be fatal. Vondra also highlighted energy security as a significant security challenge for the future, and requested high-level U.S. intervention to prevent Lukoil's plans to buyout ConocoPhillips' 16.3% stake in the Czech refinery Ceska Rafinerska (CRC) (reported reftel). USD/P Edelman said he would mention Vondra's concerns to State Department colleagues.

Parliamentarians

¶16. (C) Edelman met over breakfast on March 28 with the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Miroslav Vlcek (CSSD), the Chairman of the Chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee, Jan Hamacek (CSSD), and Social Democratic (CSSD) Party Whip Michael Hasek (a fourth MP, Tomas Dub from the governing ODS, joined the breakfast late but did not participate in the discussion). The intent was to engage with a number of thoughtful but skeptical MPs from the opposition CSSD on missile defense. Vlcek and Hasek confined their comments to complaints that the Czech government had not adequately briefed the full Parliament on missile defense. Hamacek, on the other hand, offered thoughtful questions about the impact the U.S. system in Central Europe would have on European security overall, including NATO cohesion and the debate over a European security identity; he expressed concerns about the Russian reaction, noting that regardless of whether their complaints were valid, they exist and cannot be ignored; finally, Hamacek suggested that a Czech decision to accept the U.S. assets would constitute a broader Czech consent to U.S. foreign and security policies, and that this needed to be more fully debated by the Czechs.

¶17. (C) Edelman described the U.S. offer as being in line with 60 years of U.S. policy towards Europe -- offering assistance to promote the European common defense. He stressed that the decision to place a third site in Europe was taken to expand missile defense coverage to our allies, and that the USG believes this step will accelerate development of a layered NATO missile defense structure.

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Time is a critical factor, and the U.S. is convinced of the need to begin work now, in advance of potential offensive missile programs being completed. On Russia, Edelman suggested that the small U.S. system proposed for Central Europe is less destabilizing than the 85 nuclear-tipped interceptor missiles that Russia currently has, and has had deployed for 35 years. He also made reference to the debate the Japanese undertook on missile defense, which concluded that a defensive system to counter missile threats is much less destabilizing than offensive counter-measures would be. In the end the MPs expressed great appreciation for the chance to meet and discuss the system, and stressed the importance of the USG providing additional information to answer questions about both technical and political/strategic concerns.

¶18. (U) Under Secretary Edelman has cleared this cable.
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